MUTIUS SCÆVOLA
THE ROMAN PATRIOT
AN HISTORICAL DRAMA
BY W. H. IRELAND
AUTHOR OF THE ABBESS, RIMUALDO, BALLADS, POEMS,&c.&c.&c.
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1801.

The Historic page records the most energetic and luminous examples of public and private virtue,while it is also shadowed with the ebon tints of moral delinquency.

Combining thus every trait of human conduct,it becomes an instructive guide,and offers a fertile source for dramatic composition.

The reader will no doubt feel an interest in those facts which form the basis of our play,the outlines of which are as follows:-

Mutius Scævola,surnamed Cordus,was a Roman famous for his courage and intrepidity. When Porsenna,king of Etruria,had beseiged Rome,to reinstate Tarquin in his rights and privileges, Mutius determined to deliver his country from so dangerous an enemy.Having disguised himself in the habit of a Tuscan, and being perfect master of that language,he gained an easy introduction into the camp,and thence into the royal tent: where finding Porsenna conversing alone with his secretary, he immediately rushed on the latter,and mistaking him for his royal master,plunged a dagger into his heart.He then surrended himself to the guard,who alarmed at the noise had just entered the tent.

When interrogated respecting the motive that had urged him to so desperate an act,Mutius boldly replied - That he was a Roman;-that he had thus entered the camp in disguise, to deliver his countrymen from the tyranny of Porsenna;-and that 300 Roman youths,like himself,had sworn to destroy him, or perish in the attempt.Then sternly fixing his eyes on the king,he laid his right hand on an altar of burning coals,and without uttering a groan suffered the flames to consume it.

This extraordinary act of heroism,added to the confession made by Mutius,so astounded Porsenna,that he made peace with Rome,and retired from the city.

Mutius obtained the name of Scævola,for having lost the use of his right hand,by burning it in the presence of the Etrurian king.

History further instructs us,that the generosity of Porsenna's behaviour to the captives was so much admired by the Romans,that to record his humanity,they erected a brazen statue to his memory.

The author has deviated in some few particulars from the original story and has blended other incidents,to form as he hopes,an interesting Drama.

London
June 27th.1801. W.H.I.

ERRATUM.

Page 47,line 8,for courage read carnage.

Having failed in obtaining a copy of this play
I copied the first part of it from the B.M. copy
G Helder Libbis

Mutius Scaevola.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

ROMANS.

Mutius Scæ vola	
Valerius	Consuls
Lucretius	
Roman Messenger	
Servius,	Head Guard
Clelia	
Attendant	

ETRURIANS.

Porsenna,	King of Etruria.
Lentellus,	General in Chief.
Manlius,	An Officer.
Silvia	

Officers, Guards, Chorus Singers &c.

Scene

Before Rome.

MUTIUS SCÆVOLA.

ACT 1.

SCENE 1. THE ETRURIAN CAMP.

PORSENNA coming forward)

Propitious Fortune smiles upon our arms:
The bold presumptious sons of Rome are tam'd,
And suplicate in vain the angry gods
To stir in their behalf.Methinks I see
These haughty spirits bow'd beneath the weight
Of dire misfortune.Clos'd within their walls,
In throngs they pour their lamentations forth,
And weary Jove with futile prayers.No more
Their conquering legions scour the fertile plains
Their senators,their aged and their young,
Their matrons,wives and virgins,bend alike the stu
The stubborn knee,and to their altars cling,
Rending the air with vows,with groans and tears.
Gods:how my soul rejoices at the thought
Since in my grasp is plac'd the avenging rod
To scourge this proud and daring race,whose arms
So oft have bow'd Etruria's sons in fight
And made us wear the Roman yoke.

LENTELLUS

Most royal sir,to you our country owes
The glorious conquest of their legion'd hosts:
The palsied foe shrinks at thy martial name,
And terror struck,contemplates all thy deeds.
Porsenna is at once the Roman's dread,
And bless'd Etruria's boast.

PORSENNA

And what befits the monarch's crown so well
As love from those who own the sceptr'd sway,
And bow submissive to their country's laws?
I seek not to conciliate faction's hate,
But live in good men's hearts:the praise of vice
Is ever by the virtuous mind condemn'd.
'Tis baneful as the pestilential wind,
On which rides meagre death.Th' applause of vice
Blots out fair virtue from the soul that's praised,
And singles it for infamy.

LENTELLUS

Such ne'er will prove Porsenna's lot.His acts
Weighed in the scale of justice,claim alike
The smile of gods,the love of worthy men.

PORSENNA

Tell me,Lentellus,are our proffered terms
Now forwarded to Rome?

LENTELLUS

A messenger,by dawn dispatch'd bore hence
Your summons to the Roman senate.

Mutius Scaevola

PORSENNA.

'Tis well:-
Let them at large discuss the weighty point,
Still shall they bow submissive to my will,
And own me for a conqueror. If, stern,
They dare my clemency deride, and bar
Against victorious troops their city's gates,
To-morrow's dawn will I beseige proud Rome,
And level with the earth its massive walls:
Etrurian swords shall bathe in Roman blood
Consuming flames shall rage on every side,
And with its spoils my legions will return
Triumphant to their friends and countrymen.

LENTELLUS.

Swell'd with the pride of conquest, even now
Each soldier burns with godlike emulation:
Their big hearts, eager for the glorious fray,
Tumultuous throb against their manly breasts,
And nerve them with a more than mortal fire.
I would the senate, deaf to our demand,
Return'd us bold defiance: for I thirst
To root this warlike people from the soil,
E'en as a gentle stream by torrents swell'd,
O'erflow its banks, and deluges around
The fertile plains: so gradually increased,
This pigmy tribe, to mighty numbers grown,
Against their neighbours bear the hostile steel,
And seem to covet universal sway.

PORSENNA.

Lentellus, hold!
Sweet mercy is the attribute of gods,
And graces more the hero than his spoils,
Or pining captives to his chariot lash'd,
My friend, the Roman pride is humbled now,
The gods forfend that we should crave more blood,
For me, I trust they will not madly spurn
The good that's tender'd; but with open arms,
Not as victors, but as friends embrace us.
Yet soft! Trumpet sounds)
Yon trumpet's clangor speaks the herald near.
Enter Etrurian Herald with a Roman messenger)
Our fix'd determination being known,
What answer bring'st thou from the Senate?

ROMAN.

Porsenna, as a Roman I shall speak;
For well I know your manliness of soul
Will not the frankness of my tongue despise.
I plead my country's cause,- cause of Rome.
My speech, untutor'd in the whining phrase
Of honied flattery, shall quick unfold
The answer of our reverend rulers.
Porsenna wills that Romans should be slaves
And Romans will defend their liberty:
Propitious gods smile on Porsenna's arms-
Fate frowns on Rome, still Romans dare be free.
You would my countrymen should own the yoke,
And place reliance on your clemency-
We cannot bend before Etruria's king,
Nor shame our gods, our country, and our rights.
Such terms as honour dictates we will hear.
We know, the worst that can befall is death:
And who so base but would resign his life

Mutius Scaevola

To save him from dishonour?
Porsenna would not hesitate in this;
His valour and his virtues stamp him Man:
Then why should Romans,by a deed of shame,
Insure Porsenna's hate ?-If,less severe,
You proffer terms becoming manly souls,
Our senators will purchase peace:if not
Romans know how to die.

PORSENNA.

Roman attend !
Not to dispraise bold virtue would I speak,
For I do reverence thy country's deeds,
Yet inwardly lament the tides of blood
Wherein Etruria's sons ere long must bathe
Their vengeful hands. My injur'd people's cause
Have urg'd me to adopt a conqueror's phrase,
Nor can I vary in my fix'd intent;
But on this bold defiance must proceed,
And hurl destruction on thy daring race.
- 'Tis thus resolved:
And to your senate therefore bear my words;
Still adding,that Porsenna grants this day
For further consultation.

ROMAN.

Our senators demand no lenity:
Porsenna is resolved,and so are they.
We'll to the last defend our city's rights,
And,nobly buried in its ruined walls,
Purchase a glorious and immortal grave.
EXIT.

PORSENNA.

Conduct him safe without the camp -
Lentellus,they decide as thou requir'st;
My proffered friendship is with boldness spurn'd,
And I must frame my soul to deeds of death.
To thy charge do I yéild the dread attack -
To-morrow's dawn must to our soldier's rage
The spoils of Rome consign.

LENTELLUS.

Aye,and the senator's and people's blood
Shall pay this bold presumption.- What is Rome,
That it should haughtily defy the foe
Whose conqu'ring arms have tam'd its children's pride,
And even now,before their walls encamped,
Threaten with famine,flame,and sword conjoin'd,
To lay its altars with the humble dust ?
What is this race - which boasts descent from gods,
That it should contumeliously dispise
The terms of friendship and the shafts of death ?
Curse on their pride:- but they shall rue the dawn
Yes,by our gods,to-morrow's rising sun,
Crowning yon city with its golden beams,
Shall give it,like a gay deck'd sacrafice,
To slaughter and eternal ruin.

PORSENNA.

My friend,thy dauntless courage stands confess'd,
And bold achievements claim thy sov'reign's praise:
Yet,why this vengeance and this thirst of blood ?
I reverence the actions thou contemn'st,

Mutius Scaevola.

And rather weep than vaunt their dire effects.
Thou must, to gain Porsenna's love entire,
Root vengeance from thy breast; it is a vice
That blots from out the catalogue of fame
The conqueror's deeds, and slurs the hero's name.